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PROFESSIONAL FIREARMS TRAINING FOR YOU

ITA Firearm Training

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In recent years, the firearm training industry has greatly developed on a global scale, due to the consistent increase in firearms purchases. Subsequently, there has been an even greater need for the training of firearm instructors.

Based in South Africa, International Firearm Training Academy (ITA) is a service provider which specializes in the professional training of firearms instructors. Established before firearm training was formally recognised by South Africa's Department of Higher Education and Training, ITA is the top service provider in the country and partners with over 280 accredited training centers that have access to their training system and materials.

In comparison to most industries, the firearms industry is still relatively young in South Africa and has only been recognised as a professional industry for approximately 15 years. In 2001 the Government's Education Department implemented the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) which allowed for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) by higher education institutions across the country. The framework included the recognition of the expertise and skills of firearms instructors, allowing these individuals to obtain formally recognised qualifications in their field. The establishment of a recognised profession was vital in formalising South Africa's firearms industry, which has seen significant growth in the last 10 years.

André Pretorius

As one of the country's oldest firearms training providers, ITA offers a variety of high-quality training programmes that are on par with international firearms training standards. Company owner Nikki Pretorius discusses some of the factors that contribute to ITA's market-leading status in South Africa: "ITA was established many years before other training providers in the market, and ITA's founder André, worked with the Standards Generating Body (SGB) when it came to re-write the Unit Standards for the formal firearms training qualification. In addition to this, ITA is the only lead service provider in South Africa that offers training for all the unit standards that make up the full Certificate in Firearm Training (SAQA Qualification ID 50480)."

ITA's origins can be traced back to 1993 when the founder, André Pretorius, travelled to the United States and enrolled in the National Rifle Association's (NRA) Firearms instructor training courses. Upon completion of his training, André returned home to South Africa as one of the country's most highly-qualified firearms trainers in the country. Not to mention also the youngest at the time!



Nikki explains how throughout Andre's two-decade tenure with ITA, "he worked closely with other firearms professionals to not only develop ITA as a business but to advance the standards within the local firearms industry. His work with firearms experts of various disciplines (such as ballistics, policing, ex-military personnel, outcomes-based educational, and other firearm instructors, etc.) established ITA as a market-leading firearm training provider."

Andre's strategic efforts for the company extend to his work with the South African government, in the implementation of industry changes that were necessary when the Firearms Control Act was adopted in 2000. This is further demonstrated through his significant role in establishing a professional industry body, known as the Professional Firearms Training Council (PFTC). This particular process was vital in ensuring that quality assurance standards were met and that a clear guideline was established for the professional training of firearms instructors and the creation of training materials for the industry.

The legacy of Andre's contributions live on in both the firearms industry and in ITA, reinforced by the experts he originally partnered with and supported by his wife Nikki, who stepped into ITA's leadership role after Andre's passing in 2017.

Nikki's dedication to his legacy and determination to sustain ITA's market-leading position, have resulted in a dramatic career change. From the onset, one of Nikki's main goals was to enhance her skills and knowledge in order to effectively lead the business. During her first year at the helm, she qualified as a firearms instructor, then as an assessor and is constantly upskilling herself on the shooting range and expanding her firearms know-how.

These firearms-related skills are complemented by her honours degree in corporate communications as well as her branding and marketing background which have aided in her enhancement of ITA's training materials. ITA's "new look" training manuals were launched in 2019, garnering a positive response from their training partners and from learners. As a highly motivated individual, Nikki continually seeks ways to advance the business, going so far as to obtain a National Diploma in Occupational Directed

Educational Training and Development Practices. This affords her the knowledge to personally ensure that ITA's training systems and materials comply with SAQ's requirements for educational materials and learner programs.

The company's training offering is extensive and includes courses for private citizens wanting to license a firearm for self-defence to the full Firearms Trainer professional qualification. Another key area of business is the training of security personnel. The country's private security industry is massive and security officers are legally required to maintain their competency and qualification.

Learners who receive training from ITA or an ITA-accredited training centre, receive safe and professional instruction that ensures they are competent with their firearm and compliant with law. As a supporting mechanism for the practical implementation of firearm-related laws, ITA sets itself apart from its competitors by maintaining a standard of excellence in its training systems and materials thanks to their advanced understanding

of the firearms educational system and through the use of adult learning methodologies in their programmes.

Most of ITA's programmes are accredited by the PFTC and are compliant with the South African Qualifications Authority's (SAQA) respective requirements for full qualifications and unit standards.

While ITA's main operations take place in South Africa, their training system is used in other African countries such as Namibia & Kenya. Here the accredited training partners utilise the ITA training system even though there are no formalised processes that govern firearm training and no formal qualifications in the use of firearms that are recognised by the respective governments and these countries.

Moving further afield, ITA's materials are also used in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, by ITA Counsellors - an ITA-originated title given to high-level firearms training facilitators who specialise in Instructor Training.

The success of ITA and that of South Africa's firearms industry is not without its challenges however. Factors that may appear distant and unrelated to a country at the southernmost tip of



Nikki Pretorius

Africa can have a significant impact on businesses within its borders.

The global lockdown in 2020 resulted in supply chain issues that had far-reaching consequences across the world. In addition to this, the price of raw materials increased and raised the cost of goods such as paper. Businesses like ITA rely on printed training materials due to the fact that firearms training must take place in person.

The recent situation in Ukraine is also a perfect example of how a major conflict can have a knock-on effect on business in distant countries. The war in Ukraine has added an extra challenge for South Africa's firearms-related business in acquiring ammunition and the components for reloading ammunition, such as primers, powders, as well as other key firearms components. These items have not only become far harder to source but have also been subject to a significant price increase.

ITA owner Nikki however, is positive about the future of the business and South Africa's firearm industry:

"Every industry faces its challenges, but the firearms industry is doing well. Firearm

ownership in South Africa continues to grow, whether it be private citizens licensing a handgun for personal protection, or security officers entering the booming private security industry. South Africa needs professional Firearms Instructors to accommodate the increase in learners we're seeing at training centres around the country."

With an ambitious leader and the support of firearms experts, ITA is sure to stay at the forefront of South Africa's firearms training industry.

"We have some projects in development right now that I am very excited to launch to the industry with the next 6-12 months", says Nikki.

Whether you're a firearm novice or an experienced marksman, professional training is a must for all firearm owners. International Firearm Training Academy are the experts when it comes to professional firearms training in South Africa. Alongside their accredited training partners across the country, they provide firearm owners access to a high standard of training programs.

